



**APTA SEM-SS-RP-008-09, Rev. 1**

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APTA Security Emergency Management  
Working Group

# Safe Mail and Package Handling

**Abstract:** This recommended practice covers the receipt of mail and packages to transit agencies.

**Keywords:** CBRNE, mail, package handling, transit

**Summary:** A safe mail and package handling plan allows a transit agency to implement basic safety procedures for general mail and package handling and additional safety measures for employees during times of heightened security. A number of federal agencies have developed detailed mail-handling procedures that are available on the internet (see “References” at the end of this document). Based on the size of the transit agency, the personnel responsible for receiving, opening and delivering mail or packages shall participate in training regarding this recommended practice. Summary of recommendations:

- Perform an assessment to review existing procedures.
- Make response consistent with Emergency Response Plan.
- Train employees on proper handling procedures.
- Post information in central location where mail is initially received and handled.

**Scope and purpose:** This recommended practice provides basic guidelines needed to develop a safe mail and package handling plan. Guidelines include information on training, normal mail handling safety measures, handling of suspicious mail and personal protective equipment. Although the actual risk of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, explosives (CBRNE) exposure through the handling of mail is relatively small, development of a mail handling plan and supporting procedures provides some assurance to employees responsible for handling packages and mail. The purpose of this recommended practice is to provide guidelines to transit agencies for the development of plans and procedures in order to limit employee exposure to CBRNEs.

This document represents a common viewpoint of those parties concerned with its provisions, namely transit operating/planning agencies, manufacturers, consultants, engineers and general interest groups. The application of any recommended practices or guidelines contained herein is voluntary. APTA standards are mandatory to the extent incorporated by an applicable statute or regulation. In some cases, federal and/or state regulations govern portions of a transit system's operations. In cases where this is a conflict or contradiction between an applicable law or regulation and this document, consult with a legal advisor to determine which document takes precedence.

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# Table of Contents

Participants.....	iii
Introduction.....	iii
<b>1. Assessment .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Training .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3. Implementation.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>4. Exercises .....</b>	<b>2</b>
Related APTA standards.....	3
References.....	3
Abbreviations and acronyms.....	3
Summary of document changes .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Document history.....	3



## Participants

The American Public Transportation Association greatly appreciates the contributions of the **APTA Security Emergency Management Working Group**, which provided the primary effort in the drafting of this document.

At the time this recommended practice was completed, the working group included the following members:

### **Thomas Eng, LACMTA, Chair**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 Christy Bailly, <i>Metro Transit</i>                | 12 Reginald Mason, <i>SNC-Lavalin</i>                     |
| 2 Marla Blagg, <i>BART</i>                            | 13 Christopher McKay, <i>TSA</i>                          |
| 3 Tom Brown   | 14 Robert Melan, <i>TSA</i>                               |
| 4 Samuel Caron, <i>Metro Transit</i>                  | 15 Clare Muetting, <i>TSA</i>                             |
| 5 Neil Crosier, <i>King County Metro/DOT</i>          | 16 John Plante, <i>Metra</i>                              |
| 6 Alexa Dupigny-Samuels, <i>WMATA</i>                 | 17 Michael Riggs, <i>MTA of Harris County</i>             |
| 7 Rufus Francis, <i>Santa Clara Valley</i>            | 18 Jill Shaw, <i>Dallas Area Rapid Transit</i>            |
| 8 Paul Harvey, <i>VIA Metropolitan Transit</i>        | 19 Lurae Stuart, <i>WSP USA</i>                           |
| 9 Sheila Hockel, <i>Bi-State Development Agency</i>   | 20 Anthony Tisdale, <i>Federal Transit Administration</i> |
| 10 Ann Hutcheson, <i>Eastern Contra Costa Transit</i> | 21 Alexander Ubiadas, <i>TriMet</i>                       |
| 11 Mark Johnson, <i>Lane Transit District</i>         |   |

### **Project team**

Saahir Brewington, *American Public Transportation Association*  
David Hahn, *Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority*  
Polly Hanson, *American Public Transportation Association*  
Dennis Lytton, *San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District*  
Paul MacMillan

## Introduction

*This introduction is not part of APTA SEM-SS-RP-008-09, Rev. 1, “Safe Mail and Package Handling.”*

APTA recommends the use of this document by:

- individuals or organizations that operate transit systems;
- individuals or organizations that contract with others for the operation of transit systems; and
- individuals or organizations that influence how transit systems are operated (including but not limited to consultants, designers and contractors).

# Safe Mail and Package Handling

## 1. Assessment

Each transit agency shall perform an assessment to determine its risk or threat level relative to being a target for threatening mail or packages. The assessment shall also review existing procedures to determine if processes currently in place are meeting the changing mail and package handling protocols, or if new or additional agency protocols need to be implemented. The assessment shall include a review of:

- risk or threat assessment to identify current risk or threat level to the agency;
- the personnel at the agency responsible for the safe handling of mail and packages;
- delivery acceptance procedures, including how and where mail and packages enter the agency;
- physical layout of the mail handling facility to promote easy visibility and monitoring;
- access control to the mail handling facility;
- characteristics of suspicious mail and packages;
- responsible personnel's ability to identify a suspicious letter or package;
- the internal distribution process; and
- emergency response procedures in case a suspicious letter or package is discovered.

The response to a mail security incident shall be consistent with the agency's emergency response plan and commensurate with the perceived threat. The agency shall identify a coordinator who will have overall responsibility for safe mail and package handling. The transit agency also shall conduct a risk or threat assessment. This may include receiving threatening mail and packages, training of mail staff, preparation of safe mail and package handling procedures, mail facility layout, and other factors that can have an impact on the agency's ability to respond to an incident. In addition, the risk or threat assessment shall look at how the agency's safe mail and package handling procedures integrate with other existing emergency plans and procedures, including:

- bomb threat procedures;
- facility evacuation procedures;
- the Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP), should a contamination occur and an area or facility be shut down;
- the agency's document review policy; and
- communications from the National Terrorism Advisory System (NTAS) and the intelligence of potential threats.

In the case of an NTAS threat alert, the transit agency shall consider the appropriate protective equipment for its mail handlers.

## 2. Training

The transit agency shall consider the following elements with regard to training:

- Identify what constitutes a suspicious package or piece of mail.
- Use personal protective equipment (PPE) deemed appropriate for the task.
- Identify and take the proper steps should a suspicious package or piece of mail be received.
- Conduct periodic drills to test procedures concerning the identification, handling and response to suspicious mail and packages, and to determine whether additional training or updates are necessary.

As part of an agency's training efforts, the local branch of the U.S. Postal Service can be contacted to provide, at no cost, recommendations for the handling and identification of suspicious mail and packages. The U.S. Postal Service has its own website that contains detailed guidance on safe mail handling. The local office of the FBI also can be contacted for such training.

## 3. Implementation

Visibly post the following information in central locations receiving mail and packages:

- internal and external notification and emergency procedures
- emergency contact numbers
- information posters and bulletins from the FBI and U.S. Postal Service

## 4. Exercises

The agency shall periodically perform exercises that test employees who are responsible for safe mail and package handling. These tests can include introducing a test suspicious mail or package into the mail system to determine how well current procedures are followed, and to identify if any changes to the procedures are needed based upon the results of the exercise. The person responsible for safe mail and package handling shall conduct the drills in coordination with local first responders and the transit agency's emergency management program (if one exists).

## Related APTA standards

APTA SS-SEM-RP-004-09, “General Guidance on Transit Incidents Drill and Exercises”

## References

Federal Bureau of Investigations, “Suspicious Package Indicators and Recommended Response Procedures,” March 2018. <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/suspicious-package-indicators.pdf/view>

United States Department of Homeland Security, “Best Practices for Managing Mail Screening and Handling Processes: A Guide for the Public and Private Sectors,” September 2012. [www.dhs.gov/publication/isc-mail-handling-non-fouo#](http://www.dhs.gov/publication/isc-mail-handling-non-fouo#)

United States Postal Inspection Service: <https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/>

United States Postal Service publications:

“Handling and Processing Mail Safely,” [https://about.usps.com/publications/pub166/pub166\\_tech\\_015.htm](https://about.usps.com/publications/pub166/pub166_tech_015.htm)

“Guide to Mail Center Security,” <http://about.usps.com/publications/pub166.pdf>

## Abbreviations and acronyms

<b>CBRNE</b>	chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, explosive
<b>COOP</b>	Continuity of Operations Plan
<b>FBI</b>	Federal Bureau of Investigation
<b>HVAC</b>	heating, ventilating and air conditioning
<b>NATSA</b>	North American Transportation Services Association
<b>NTAS</b>	National Terrorism Advisory System
<b>PPE</b>	personal protective equipment

## Document history

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First published	—	—	—	—	Dec. 31, 2009
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